

"So you've lured us here to take revenge on living boys, have you?" asked the Christmas Pig, still gripping Jack's hand under the table.

"Of course not!" sneered Ambition. "We aren't interested in petty revenge! Our aim is to do whatever we must to rise higher, to gain more prestige, to achieve greater success—"

"To increase our *POWER!*" roared the king. "We know what you seek: the one called DP—"

"Where is he?" asked Jack desperately. "Do you know?"

"YES, I KNOW!" screamed Power. "*BUT YOU WILL NEVER FIND HIM, NEVER, BECAUSE I AM ABOUT TO TRADE YOU TO THE LOSER! IN RETURN, HE WILL REWARD ME, AND WITH AMBITION AS MY QUEEN, I SHALL RULE STILL VASTER TERRITORIES, UNTIL MY POWER RIVALS HIS OWN!*"

"Calmly, Your Majesty, calmly," said Ambition, laying a bony hand on Power's arm again. "We need votes to proceed, remember . . . Now listen, all of you," she said, addressing Beauty, Optimism, Memory, and the Principles. "If we trade these two to the Loser, he might give us things in return. Perhaps an enlarged palace, with even more mirrors"—she glanced at Beauty—"or a guarantee he'll stay outside the city walls! We might even be allowed a say in who comes to the City of the Missed! Occasionally some Thing arrives that is not of the standard we expect . . . you all remember that scruffy Poem, I'm sure, and that ghastly, common Pretense . . . Beauty, how do you vote?"

"You know, I'm awfully afraid this is going to turn into a fight," said Beauty, getting to his feet. "And I *never* fight. One's hair gets messed up and in severe cases, one's teeth may be knocked out. I shall go to bed. Vote without me."

"You'll go nowhere," snarled Power. "The doors are locked. Vote, or I'll knock out your teeth. Do you want to hand them to the Loser, yes or

no?"

"Oh, well, if it means more mirrors, yes," sighed Beauty, sitting back down again. He picked up his spoon and fell back to admiring his reflection.

"Memory, dear," said Ambition, "you agree, I'm sure, that we should hand these fugitives to the Loser?"

"Sixty-nine years ago," said Memory, in her high, cracked voice, "my mistress and her sister, Amelia Louise, went to see a movie called *The Fugitive*—"

"Memory, concentrate," snapped Ambition. "We're taking a vote. Should we hand the boy and the pig to the Loser, yes or no?"

The old lady glowing with indigo light turned her gaze upon Jack and the Christmas Pig. There was a long silence. Then Memory said, "No. *They* don't stop me remembering things. I like them."

"Thank you, Memory," whispered the Christmas Pig, still clutching Jack's hand under the table.

"And you, Optimism?" demanded Power.

"I told them everything would work out wonderfully!" said Optimism, his lip wobbling. "I told them you were good and kind, Power!"

"*VOTE!*" thundered Power.

"Well, I vote no," said Optimism, with a little sob. "And I'm sure that deep down, Power—deep, deep down—there's a little bit of good in you, and when you've thought it over, you'll change your mind and let them live in the palace with us!"

"*SHUT UP!*" roared Power. "What about you, Principles? You realize these two have broken the laws of the Land of the Lost? It is forbidden for the living to enter here!"

"True," said the Principles, speaking all together as usual. "We disapprove of breaking the law."

"Then you vote yes?" asked Ambition eagerly, but before the Principles could answer, there came another couple of metallic clicks, and a familiar voice spoke from the end of the room.

"Why was I locked in my room?"

A blaze of golden light filled the dining hall, as Happiness entered.



THE LAST TWO GUESTS

I—I thought you needed a rest after your long journey, Your Highness,” said Ambition nervously, dropping into a curtsy as Happiness moved into the room, shedding golden light all around her. “I didn’t think you’d want to be bothered with this tedious bit of business, the very evening you arrived.”

“How did you get *OUT*?” demanded Power. “Come to that—how did you get through *THOSE* doors?”

“I unlocked them,” said a second voice. “You know very well that no lock can contain me, Power.”

Jack hadn't noticed the second Thing that had entered the room, because Happiness's radiance had blinded him for a moment, but now he saw a woman as tall as Ambition, though far more strongly built. She was very beautiful, but the soft pink light she gave off was less bright than that of the other Things. Unlike her fellow royals, she had wings: not stiff, upstanding wings of golden plastic, like those of Broken Angel back on the Wastes, but vast feathery wings of white shading to deep pink, which trailed behind her on the floor like a train.

"How lovely to see you two again," said Happiness, smiling at Jack and the Christmas Pig. "This," she said, indicating her companion, "is my friend Hope."

The pink lady also smiled at Jack and the Christmas Pig and terrified as they were, they smiled back. Hope and Happiness sat down in the last two chairs at the table.

"We hear you're taking a vote on handing our guests to the Loser," said Happiness. "Please continue. We'd be glad to take part."

"Very well," said Ambition. "This living boy and his pig have broken the law in pursuit of an impossible goal. The only way for a lost Thing to return to the Land of the Living is by being found Up There, and as DP can *never* be found Up There—"

"Why can't he?" said Jack.

"Because a lorry ran over him on the motorway," said Ambition, with a cruel smile. "All that remains of your DP up in the Land of the Living are a few scattered beans and a bit of fluff. He cannot be found, so he remains with us, forever."

"No," whispered Jack, "I don't believe it. It can't be true."

But as he said it, he remembered the tiny shake of his head Grandpa had given Gran, when he came back to the car after looking for DP.

"You *can* still get him back," said the Christmas Pig fiercely, still clutching Jack's hand beneath the table. "I promise, Jack, you can save DP."

"Well spoken, Pig," said Hope. "Ambition has forgotten what night it is, up in the Land of the Living." Turning to the king, she went on, "These two came bravely into the Land of the Lost in the hope of achieving the impossible and tonight, the night for miracles and lost causes, they have a chance."

"Which they richly deserve," said Happiness. "I vote against giving them to the Loser."

"As do I," said Hope.

"Then," said Ambition, placing her hand again on Power's arm, because the king looked as though he was about to explode with rage again, "we have three votes for giving them to the Loser and four against. The deciding votes lie with the Principles."

She turned back to the six identical small blue men.

"You agree that these two have broken the law?"

"We do," said the Principles, speaking in one voice, as always.

"But handing a living boy to the Loser would be murder and that's the worst crime there is!" said the Christmas Pig.

"Also true," said the Principles, together.

"I only want DP back!" said Jack desperately. "I never wanted to do any harm!"

"How do you vote, Principles?" Ambition demanded, ignoring Jack. "What should happen to liars and rule breakers, who seek to disobey the ancient law of the Land of the Lost? No matter their motive, don't you agree that they belong to the Loser, to punish as he sees fit?"

"Yes," said three of the Principles, but the rest answered, "No."

"Seven-six—we won!" Jack whispered to the Christmas Pig, but at that moment, Power jumped to his feet.

"I VOTE THAT THE VOTES DON'T COUNT!" he roared, smacking the giant peppermint to the floor, his teeth bared and his fists clenched. Beauty sank slowly beneath the table and out of sight, taking his shining spoon with him. Memory began to mumble something about Amelia Louise, but nobody heard what it was, because Power now shouted, *"LOSS ADJUSTERS! TAKE THESE THINGS TO THE LOSER!"*



FLIGHT

At these words, both sets of doors at either end of the room burst open, and with a great clamor and clatter, in ran the biggest group of Loss Adjusters Jack had seen since Mislaid. There were razors, scissors, pincers, and knives; wire clippers, chisels, and the huge mallet, all of them wearing the plumed black hats of the palace guards. Jack and the Christmas Pig both jumped up from their chairs. Jack grabbed some popcorn, ready to throw it, and the Christmas Pig picked up the giant peppermint.

"*SEIZE THEM!*" roared Power, and for a moment Jack was certain that they were going to be captured and taken to the Loser's Lair, and that he'd never see Mum or DP again.

But then, to his amazement, Jack felt a warm, strong arm encircle him, heard a great whoosh of wings, and felt himself rising into the air, up above the roar and clash of all the metal Things below. Hope had caught Jack up in one arm and the Christmas Pig in the other, and she now flew on her huge wings across the room, while Power screamed in rage. Happiness increased her own dazzling light, confusing the Things giving chase, and Hope flew through the double doors at the end of the room and off along a dark corridor.

"Where are we going?" asked Jack, clutching Hope's strong arm as they flew, while the Loss Adjusters clattered along in pursuit.

"To DP," said Hope. "I'm not allowed to enter the place where he lives: only the most precious in the Land of the Lost may set foot there. I can carry you most of the way, but you'll have to do the last bit yourself. Grab that tapestry off the wall!" she added, and Jack reached out and tugged it. The heavy material broke free and billowed behind them. It was so heavy it took all Jack's strength to keep hold of it, and it slowed their progress a little. Jack could hear the shouts and the bangs of the Loss Adjusters, and thought they seemed to be gaining ground, but Hope flew up a spiral staircase, the tapestry trailing in their wake, until they reached a locked and bolted door.

Jack was sure they were trapped, but as Hope soared toward it, the bolt flew back and the door crashed open, and they flew outside into the falling snow.

"Quickly," said Hope, landing on the golden palace roof and setting Jack and the Christmas Pig down. "Wrap that tapestry around yourselves so I can carry you easily. The journey will be cold and you're already damp."

Jack and the Christmas Pig wrapped the heavy tapestry around themselves, Hope unfurled her powerful wings again, seized hold of the ma-

terial, and rose once more into the air, now carrying them below her in a kind of hammock.

Through the thick tapestry Jack could hear the screams of rage of the Loss Adjusters who'd raced out onto the roof behind them, and Power's shout of "*COME BACK! BRING THEM BACK!*"

But Hope kept flying, and soon the sound of shouting grew distant, then died away completely. Now the only sound they could hear was the beating of Hope's wide, strong wings.



THE STORY OF HOPE

Though dusty, it was cozy inside the tapestry, because Jack and the Christmas Pig were snuggled up together. After their scary dash through Power's palace, Jack found it comforting to feel the Christmas Pig's trotters around him. He didn't even mind the smell of dank canal water the Christmas Pig was giving off.

Only now they were safe did Jack fully realize that he was on his way to DP at last, and in his excitement he gave the Christmas Pig a squeeze.

"We've nearly done it!" he said. "I was so scared back there, weren't you?"

"Very scared," said the Christmas Pig. "We should thank Hope. Without her, we'd be on the way to the Loser's Lair right now."

"I know," said Jack, and raising his voice he said, "thank you very much, Hope!"

"You're welcome," came her voice from above them. "Are you comfortable?"

"Very," said Jack.

"We aren't too heavy for you, are we?" asked the Christmas Pig.

"Oh no," said Hope. "I've carried far heavier than you."

"How were you lost, Hope?" asked Jack.

"That's a sad story, I'm afraid," came Hope's voice, over the beating of her wings. "My owner is in prison."

"Prison?" gasped Jack. "What did they do?"

"Nothing wrong," said Hope. "On the contrary, she was doing a good thing: protesting against a ruler very like Power. The ruler was furious, so he locked her up, pretending she'd broken the law. The judge was too scared to rule against the president, so my owner is currently in a cell with ten others, where there isn't enough to eat and barely room to lie down."

"That's terrible!" said Jack.

"It is," agreed Hope. "At this moment, she can't see how things will ever get better for her, because they've told her she'll be in prison for twenty years. She lost me when she heard the length of her sentence, but she'll find me again, and sooner than she thinks."

"How do you know?" asked Jack.

"She has a wonderful family and many friends outside the prison walls," said Hope. "When she realizes that they're working hard to free her, she'll find me again and I'll help her bear her situation, dreadful

though it is. I may not shine as brightly as my friend Happiness, but my flame is harder to extinguish.”

Jack and the Christmas Pig swayed gently back and forth in the tapestry as Hope bore them onward. Jack was starting to feel very sleepy. After a while, he thought he heard a new sound, like the breathing of some huge slumbering beast, and he smelled something vaguely familiar. By shifting his position a little, he was able to peek over the edge of the tapestry. Far below, he saw the ocean, which was as dark as the night sky above. Snow was still falling, and Jack could see Hope’s wide, pale wings reflected in the waves.



“Where are we going, Hope?” Jack asked.

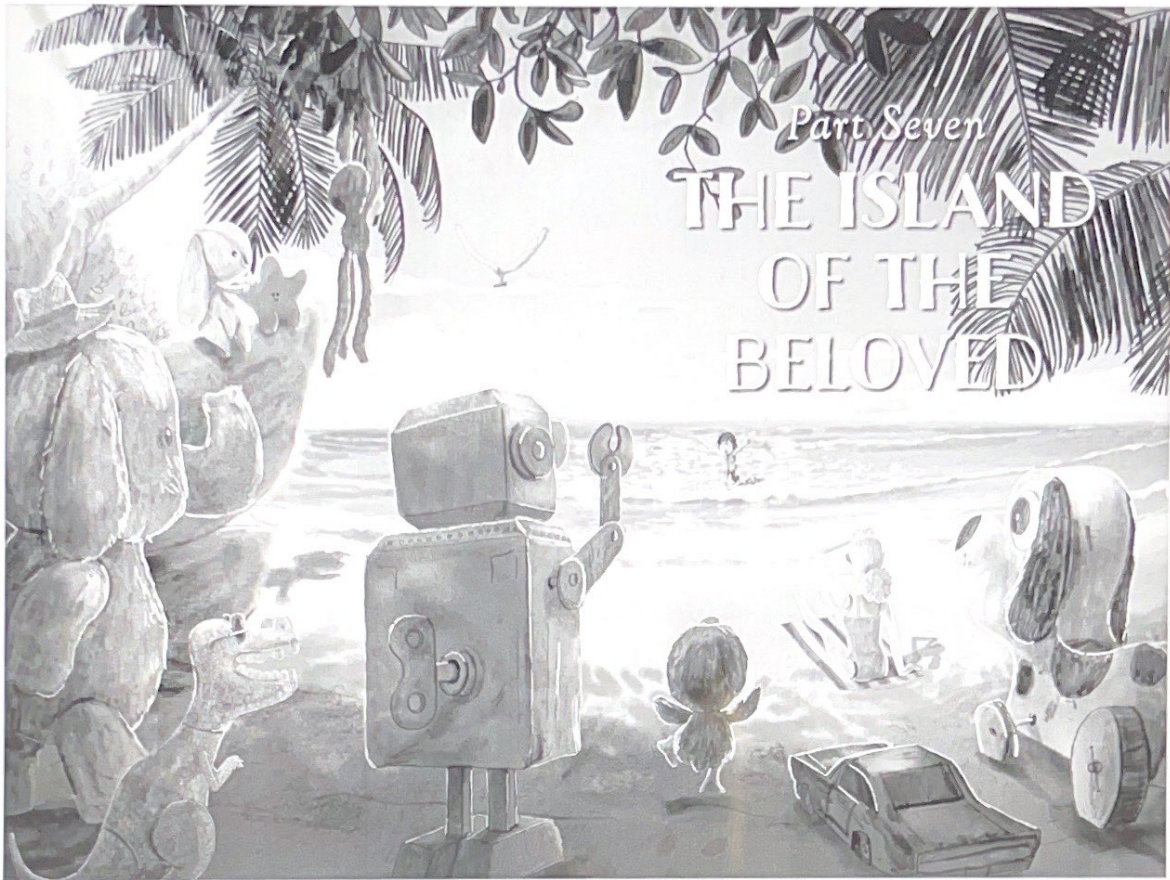
"To the Island of the Beloved," said Hope. "Only a few Things on the mainland know it exists. The truly loved are never moved off the island, so the Things in the cities never meet them. But I know the island's there, because I've flown over it.

"You should sleep now, because we've got a long way to travel. I'll wake you when it's time for you to go on alone. You've done very well, you'll complete your mission before Christmas Day! I should think you'll be home at least an hour before midnight!"

So Jack wriggled back down inside the tapestry, closed his eyes, and allowed his face to press up against the Christmas Pig's. "All those lies Ambition told us, about me not being able to get DP back!" he muttered into the Christmas Pig's damp ear. "I want to thank you, too, CP. I'd never have been able to get DP back without you."

"That's all right," said the Christmas Pig, in a strangely muffled voice. "Sleep now. You heard Hope. We've still got a long way to go."

Jack closed his eyes, squeezed the Christmas Pig again, felt the familiar belly beans, and breathed in his satisfying, grubby smell. Soon Jack was on the verge of sleep, and on his lips he tasted a salty wetness, and knew he must be dreaming of the sea, far, far below.



Part Seven
THE ISLAND
OF THE
BELOVED



THE ISLAND OF THE BELOVED

Many hours later, Jack was woken by Hope's voice calling him. "Jack, it's time," she said. "Get ready. I'm afraid you're going to get wet, but I can take you no farther!"

Jack could barely open his eyes, because the light pouring in through either end of the tapestry was as blinding as that of Happiness. The tapestry itself had become hot, and his pajamas were warm and dry again. Even his feet were warm. He realized they'd come to a place where the sun was shining brightly.

"Ready?" called Hope. "Wriggle out with your feet first: it's not a long drop, I've flown as low as I dare!"

"Come on, CP!" said Jack.

"You first," said the Christmas Pig, and Jack, who guessed he was worried about jumping into the sea as he couldn't swim, said, "I'll be there when you hit the water, CP, don't worry!"

Jack wriggled down the tapestry hammock. The smell of the sea was stronger than ever now, and he could feel the heat of the sun on his bare feet. Taking a deep breath, he pushed himself out of the tapestry.

As Hope had promised, the drop was short, and seconds later, he found himself knee-deep in the crystal clear sea, which was as warm as a bath. Looking around, he saw a beautiful island with swaying palm trees and soft white sand. The cloudless sky was periwinkle blue and dotted with many finding holes and there, running down the beach toward him, ahead of a multitude of other old toys who'd rushed to see what was going on, was DP.

"DP!" shouted Jack, starting to laugh and cry at the same time. "DP, it's me!"

DP looked exactly as he always had: gray, wonky-eared, and button-eyed, and he was beaming as he ran down the beach and into the sea. Jack splashed through the water, his arms wide open, and DP's button eyes were leaking tears, and then they reached each other and hugged as tightly as ever a boy and his toy hugged, and Jack breathed in DP's smell of bed, and garden, and of the trace of Mum's perfume, from where she kissed DP good night.

"DP, I found you, I found you!" sobbed Jack, and behind the old pig a hundred battered old toys cheered and clapped their hands, their paws, and their hooves, and one little puffin turned a somersault. "Everything's all right again! Holly threw you and I was so angry and I knew you were alone on the motorway and I couldn't stand it and I yelled and smashed up my room—"

"I know, Jack, I know," said DP, patting Jack on his back. "But it's all right, now. You've found me! Come into my house!"

With his worn old trotter around Jack's shoulders, DP guided him out of the sea onto the beach, while all the beloved Things watching continued to cheer.

"I live there," said DP, pointing to a little yellow beach house, "with somebody you know."

To Jack's amazement, he saw the old toilet roll angel peering out of the window, a wide smile on his bearded face.

The beach house was light, bright, and airy inside. Its windows gave a wonderful view over the sea and the palm trees.

"It's so nice here, DP!" said Jack.

"It is, isn't it?" said DP. "And you remember our old friend Toilet Roll Angel?"

"Yes!" said Jack. "But I thought . . . I thought you were eaten by Toby-the-dog?"

"I was," said Toilet Roll Angel, who had a lovely singsong voice. "He tore me to pieces. All that's left of me Up There is a bit of wool, which you'll find under your second-largest present, if you look."

"But . . . I don't understand," said Jack. "You're *here*."

"The Alivened part of me, yes," said Toilet Roll Angel. "Mum loved me so much, I'm permitted to live forever on the Island of the Beloved."

"But then . . ." said Jack, turning to DP as a horrible thought struck him. "Does that mean . . . ? DP, Ambition told me a lorry ran over you!"

"I'm afraid . . . I'm afraid that's true, Jack," said DP quietly. "Grandpa put himself in danger Up There, trying to get me back, but a lorry came along and ran right over me. Grandpa saw me burst. All that's left of me now in the Land of the Living are a few beans and a bit of dirty cloth."

"But you're *here*," said Jack. "I can touch you! I can feel you! I can *smell* you!"

"Yes," said DP, leading Jack to a striped sofa and sitting down beside him, "you made that happen, by loving me so much. This island's a familiar place to me, you know. Things that are deeply loved drop straight down onto the Island of the Beloved whenever we're lost. We don't even have to pass through Mislaid! I've had friends here for years, because"—DP's old button eyes twinkled—"well, you *did* lose me quite a lot, you know, Jack."

"And does the Loser never come?" asked Jack.

"Never," said DP. "He isn't permitted to set foot on this island, and even if he did, he couldn't hurt us. Our humans' love has made us immortal."

"But if you were burst by the lorry, how can I take you home? CP promised I could have you back again!"

Now DP and Toilet Roll Angel exchanged very serious looks.

"Well . . . my brother's right," said DP. "You *can* take me back to the Land of the Living tonight, if you really want to. It's still Christmas Eve Up There: the night for miracles and lost causes. However—"

"CP, we did it!" cried Jack, turning to the Christmas Pig.

But the Christmas Pig wasn't there.



THE TRUTH

CP? Christmas Pig? Where's he gone?" said Jack, looking around the room, then jumping off the sofa and hurrying to the window. "He dropped into the sea right behind me, didn't he? Oh no"—Jack gasped—"he didn't *drown*, did he? The water's not very deep—I thought he'd be safe!"

Now he came to think of it, Jack hadn't heard the splash of the Christmas Pig landing in the water behind him, he'd been far too interested in the sight of DP on the beach. Staring out of the window, he spotted something in the sky, something that looked like a gigantic bird flying away from the island, and realized it was Hope, returning to the mainland with the tapestry bundle still swinging beneath her.

"The Christmas Pig isn't allowed here, Jack," said Toilet Roll Angel in his singsong voice. "This is the place for Things that are deeply loved, up in the Land of the Living."

"But why's he flying away?" asked Jack, suddenly scared. "I've got to take him home. I promised to give him to Holly!"

"Jack," said DP, placing his trotter around Jack's shoulders again, "my brother always knew he wouldn't be able to return to the Land of the Living with you. Now that my body's been destroyed Up There, the only way I can leave the Land of the Lost is if a toy just like me makes up the Loser's numbers. The Christmas Pig decided to take my place. Every Thing knows that's how it works—but I never heard of a Thing volunteering to do it."

"Why would he do that?" whispered Jack. "*Why?*"

"He wanted to make you happy," said DP.

"He can't have done," said Jack in a very small voice. "I threw him at the wardrobe. I stamped on him. I—I tried to pull his head off."

"He understood why you did those things," said DP gently. "He was a Replacement, and Replacements, once Alivened, understand all about their owner from the very start. All that I know about you, he knows, and he's always loved you, just as much as I do."

"But—but why didn't he tell me?" whispered Jack as his eyes filled with tears again. "He pretended he could come back with me! He made me promise to give him to Holly!"

"He fibbed because he didn't want you to feel bad about what he was going to do," said DP. "CP's a modest pig. He knew your heart from the beginning and he believed he could never be to you what I am. So he decided to sacrifice himself, because your happiness was more important to him than his own."

"He should have told me!" said Jack. There was a lump as hard as a peach stone in his throat. "I thought we'd all be able to go home together! I thought I'd still see him! What will he do, when he gets back to the mainland?"

"Go to the Wastes," said DP quietly. "If I'm to go free, then the Christmas Pig must replace me in the Land of the Lost. As he's broken the law not once, but many times, any Thing that helps him now will surely be eaten. He always knew he'd have to face the Loser if he was to save me. I fear . . . I fear his time is short."

Jack turned back to the window, his eyes blurry with tears. Hope was now a tiny dot on the horizon.

"He should have told me!" Jack repeated as his tears spilled onto his cheeks. "It wasn't fair, not telling me!"

He remembered the Loser's searchlights sweeping across the Wastes and the dreadful story the Christmas Pig had told, of the Loser sucking out the Alivened part of a Thing.

It's what humans call death.

Jack stumbled back to DP's little striped sofa, sat down, and cried and cried. "I didn't want this!" he sobbed. "I never wanted him caught by the Loser!"

"I know you didn't, Jack," said DP, sitting down beside Jack and putting his trotters around him. The toilet roll angel sat on Jack's other side. He couldn't put an arm around Jack, because he didn't have any arms, but he sighed deeply and sadly.

Jack couldn't stop thinking about all that he and the Christmas Pig had gone through together. He remembered how the Christmas Pig had pretended not to like him very much, and realized that CP had done it to try and stop Jack from feeling guilty at this moment; he thought of how CP had saved them from Crusher by his quick thinking; and how

his little snout had sunk beneath the green water in the City of the Missed before Jack rescued him. Now he realized that what he'd tasted last night in the tapestry had been CP's tears. While Jack had been so excited and happy about going to the Island of the Beloved, CP had been crying, because he'd known it was the last time he'd ever see Jack, and that when they reached the Island of the Beloved, they'd have to part forever.

All along, Jack had thought that if only he found DP, he'd be happy again, but he didn't feel happy at all. Now, when it was too late, he realized he'd come to love CP, not instead of DP, but quite separately, for his brave and good self. In that moment, Jack truly understood what it felt like to be Alivened, because he understood what he was meant to do.

"DP . . . I've got to rescue CP."

DP smiled, which made his snout wrinkle exactly the way CP's did. "I hoped you'd decide that, Jack. I'm glad."

"Will you—will you come with me?"

"You know I can't, Jack," said DP quietly, putting his old gray trotter on Jack's hand. "You can only take one of us home—but if you save CP, I'll be safe here, forever, on this beautiful island. It's a wonderful place and every day I think of you, and how grateful I am that you loved me."

Jack threw his arms around his oldest friend. He'd needed DP so much, and for such a long time, it seemed impossible that he could let him go. But then Jack thought of CP, and how much CP needed him now, so he let go of DP and said through his tears, "How will I get back to the Wastes? Hope's gone!"

For a moment, nobody said anything. Then Toilet Roll Angel piped up, "I think I know someone who can help. Follow me."